

This Week in Saratoga County History

Happy Birthday Caleb!

Galway comes together for support & celebration in 1882

Submitted by Dave Waite August 17, 2022

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Caleb Ferris at 100

Galway has always been a caring community, one where both long-time residents and new arrivals pitch in and help when there is a need. In the April 12th, 1882, *Daily Saratogian* newspaper I found two examples showing that the community spirit that is still with us today was just as alive 140 years ago.

The first is the loss by fire of a barn on the Alberton farm just south of Mosherville. It must have been devastating for the family to be standing before the smoldering ruins that next morning. The thirty-seven-year-old Cornelius, his thirty-two-year-old wife Lottie, and their nine-year-old son Irwin had moved into Galway from Halfmoon only a few years before. Even with the Alberton family being new to the area, the community quickly stepped up and started a collection. In a short time, they had raised enough money to enable Cornelius to buy a small barn from the

neighboring farm of Civil War veteran Henry M. Lewis. With equal speed, this barn was dismantled with help from his neighbors and transported to the Alberton farm. It was a barn-raising to make the community proud.

On the same page of the *Saratogian* that reported the Alberton fire, was the story of another event in Galway that brought the community together. On April 10th of 1882, Caleb Ferris turned one hundred, and Galway celebrated with him.

The 100th birthday of Caleb Ferris was news across the region that spring. Even the *New York Evening Post* carried this account of his life on the front page of their April 18, 1882, edition:

Physically and mentally Mr. Ferris carries his years as lightly as many do three score. He has never used stimulants to any extent, is a moderate smoker, and has been an enthusiastic fox hunter and trapper. A year ago, he caught four foxes. Last winter he was not so lucky but says he caught a number of skunks and shot a fox. He claims he can shoot as well as ever. He had frequently walked several miles through the snow to visit his traps the past winter.

Born in Dutchess County, New York in 1782, Caleb Ferris was the son of Seth & Mary Ferris. Caleb's father, Seth, was born in Fishkill Dutchess County & his mother Mary, whose maiden name was Mosher, was also from Dutchess County. For a reason that is never explained, the Ferris family moved between Dutchess and Saratoga Counties several times, starting these moves soon after Seth & Mary were married in Providence, Saratoga County in 1780.

By 1800, Caleb was again in Providence, and there he married Alvera Root in 1812. Caleb and Alvera had three children, William, Elvira, and Caleb Dean. Alvira passed away not long after giving birth to their third child in 1824. Caleb soon married Mary Church and in 1825, Orsamus, the first of their five children was born. Following him the next year was Mary Ann, then Lydia Ann, Susan, and finally Anna Maria in 1838. In 1848, at the age of sixty-six, Caleb packed up his family and moved to Fairfax, Virginia where he took up farming. During the Civil War, his house and barns in Virginia were burned by rebels, so in 1865, at the age of eighty-three, he and Mary returned to Saratoga County. Here they resided with his son William at a farm on Foster Hill in Galway. Foster Hill is located near what is now the intersection of Greens Corners Road and Route 29.

The celebration of Caleb Ferris' birthday was truly a community event, with nearly four hundred people attending that day. As Caleb had lived and worked in Galway for nearly twenty years, many friends, some even nearly his own age attended. Milestones of this magnitude often bring in family from far and wide, and Caleb's birthday was no exception. Along with his wife Mary, there that day were grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. Caleb also had four of his children with him, including daughters from Kansas and Washington. To record his achievement, Thomas J. Arnold, the Ballston photographer, took his picture, and as it has survived to today, it has been included here.

Along with a huge spread of food brought by friends and family, Caleb was given presents to honor his day. One of the most admired of these gifts was a chair given to Caleb by Henry H. Hill.

Both the Galway Cornet Band and the drum corps performed during the celebration. As Caleb was an old fifer, he stepped up and played along with the band. The celebration concluded with speeches by eighty-six-year-old Unitarian clergyman Richard Rider of the First Christian Church of Galway and Rev. Asher Cook of Galway's First Baptist Church.

When the newspaper talked to Caleb about his life, they learned that he had been a hunter since his youth, and at times had killed as many as two wolves in one day. He also reminisced that he "was in Saratoga when the first house was being built." Even at one hundred, the paper called him a "genuine stalwart," and said that he still had abundant vitality. The *Daily Saratogian* also praised him as a "centenarian who is in fine health and full possession of his faculties and who greatly enjoyed the occasion."

In the months after his celebration, Caleb continued to be active. In November of his 100th year, his nephew Edward Shipman took him to Saratoga so he could buy his annual supply of fox bait. He planned to continue with his trap lines, even planning to get out in the deep snows and stormy winter weather. Caleb made it through the winter, but in the early spring he caught pneumonia after a trip to town and passed away on March 15th of 1883.

Galway has come together countless times since these two events in 1882. With this community spirit as alive today as it was those many years ago, it will also continue for many generations to come.

Sources: newyorkhistoricnewspapers.com and fultonhistory.org. Image of Caleb Ferris is from findagrave.com